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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAMAKO 000053

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SUBJECT: LOCAL ELECTIONS, LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES, AND
TUAREGS: A VIEW FROM THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

REF: A. 07 BAMAKO 01336

[B](#). BAMAKO 00027

[C](#). 08 BAMAKO 00968

[D](#). 07 BAMAKO 00369

[E](#). 07 BAMAKO 00786

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) Summary: National Assembly President Diouncounda Traore met with the Ambassador on January 22 to discuss legislative priorities for the Assembly's next session in April and the upcoming local elections currently scheduled for April 26. As the president of the Assembly and Mali's largest political party, Traore is among the early front runners to replace President Amadou Toumani Toure in 2012. Traore expressed skepticism about whether Mali would be able to respect the compressed electoral timeline recently articulated by Minister of Territorial Administration Kafougouna Kone. He was optimistic about the chances of passing Mali's amended Family Code, which has been pending since the late 1990s, but admitted that the Assembly had yet to receive the final draft of the revised law from the Presidency. Traore also discussed Tuareg rebel leader Ibrahim Bahanga's December foray into Traore's hometown of Nara in western Mali. Finally, Traore expressed interest in renewed exchanges with U.S. legislators at either the state or national level. Also attending the meeting were the Assembly's 3rd vice-president Ousmane Bah, Chair of the Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee Amadou Bouare, and Traore's diplomatic advisor. End Summary.

Legislative Priorities for 2009

2.(U) During a January 22 meeting with the Ambassador, National Assembly President and leader of Mali's largest political party, the Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA), Diouncounda Traore, congratulated the U.S. and the American people for the January 20 inauguration of President Obama. Traore said Mali saw the U.S. in a new light and that President Obama's election provided a "fantastic" lesson in democracy. Traore expressed hope that President Obama's inauguration would "open a new era" for both the U.S. and the world.

3.(U) Traore said priorities for the next legislative session, which begins in April, included passing a bill abolishing the death penalty and ratifying Mali's controversial Family Code. The death penalty abolition bill has been tabled for three consecutive legislative sessions, beginning in the fall of 2007, due in large part to opposition from Muslim leaders. Traore acknowledged that passing the abolition bill would be a challenge, but said it enjoyed the support of President Amadou Toumani Toure.

4.(U) Revising the Family Code was the only other piece of legislation Traore identified as a priority for the April

session. Revisions to Mali's Family Code, which dates from 1962 and severely disadvantages women and children, have been pending since the late 1990s. President Toure has repeatedly expressed support for a revised family code. The draft revisions, however, reportedly remain somewhere within the Presidency. Traore described the Family Code revisions as "extremely sensitive and extremely important" and said the changes would inject a bit more justice and equality into relations between men and women. Previous attempts to amend the Family Code have been blocked by Muslim leaders. Traore, however, said women also posed a considerable obstacle and claimed that many Malian women were also opposed to changing the Family Code.

5.(U) When asked if the Assembly had a timeline for passage of the Family Code, the Assembly's 3rd vice-president Dr. Ousmane Bah said the Presidency had yet to pass the text of the revised Code to the National Assembly. Traore then added that the Assembly would study the text once it is delivered and predicted that passage will "not pose as much trouble" as the abolition of the death penalty bill. We have, unfortunately, seen no signs indicating that the Presidency intends to submit the Family Code bill to the Assembly any time soon.

April Elections, Maybe

6.(C) Turning to the April 26 local elections, Traore said he was "rather skeptical" of the feasibility of election date recently set by Minister of Territorial Administration

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Kafougouna Kone (Ref. B). "We will see," said Traore. He noted that Mali's electoral law requires the government to formally fix the election day 60 days in advance, which would give the Ministry of Territorial Administration until late February to revisit the timeline previously articulated by Minister Kone. Traore expressed concern with the slow pace of Mali's national census and ID project known as RAVEC, which was supposed to have been completed in advance of the 2009 local elections but now likely won't be completed until late 2009 at the earliest. "We don't know," he said, "how that is going to go."

7.(C) Traore identified the lack of continuity as one of Mali's main electoral weaknesses. He said Mali would benefit from a permanent institution responsible for organizing elections and said the Independent National Electoral Commissions (CENI) organized prior to elections each involved different individuals with different interests, levels of experience and competence. This results, said Traore, in a lack of institutional memory.

Tuareg Rebels Are Nice

8.(C) Traore, who is from the town of Nara in the northern portion of the region of Koulikoro, briefly discussed Tuareg rebel leader Ibrahim Bahanga's incursion into Koulikoro in December 2008 (Ref. C). "They were nice enough," said Traore of Bahanga and his band of rebels in reference to their decision to briefly set up camp on the outskirts of Nara. Traore credited the rebels with "behaving like citizens" and said they purchased supplies at a local market - after having stolen a vehicle and fuel the day before - just like every other Malian. "What is curious," Traore continued, "is that a lot of Tuaregs leading the violence are elected officials." Bahanga was elected to Mali's second house of parliament, the High Council of Collectivities (HCC), in 2007 as one of the representatives from Kidal along with rebel Alliance for Democracy and Change leader Iyad ag Ghali (Ref. D). While ag Ghali has attended some HCC sessions, Bahanga has yet to travel to Bamako to assume his official duties as an HCC

member. Two other ADC leaders - spokesman Ahamda ag Bibi and "finance secretary" Deity ag Sidamou - were elected to the National Assembly in 2007 (Ref. E). There is a development deficit in northern Mali, said Traore, but Tuareg unrest creates a vicious circle because to correct the development deficit, one needs security.

More Legislative Exchange Programs

9.(U) Traore, vice-president Bah and Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Bouare were eager for exchange programs with U.S. legislatures. We strongly support this idea, both as a way of solidifying nearly two decades of democratic progress in Mali and increasing the effectiveness of Mali's National Assembly. Bouare, who is leading a group of three National Assembly Deputies to the U.S. in February, is hopeful that his delegation will have the opportunity to meet with some members of the U.S. Senate or House of Representatives. We have forwarded a copy of Bouare's letter to the desk for help in arranging potential consultations while Bouare and his colleagues are in Washington.

Comment: Priorities

10.(C) While many Malians do not regard Traore as the most adept politician, as the president of ADEMA and the National Assembly, Traore is among the early front runners to replace President Amadou Toumani Toure in 2012. His candid assessment of the feasibility of April 26 local elections corresponds with recent assessments by other Malian political leaders. His call for a more permanent electoral institution was somewhat unclear given that elections in Mali are organized and administered by the General Election Delegation (DGE) which reports directly to Minister Kone at the Ministry of Territorial Administration. Unlike the CENI, which is theoretically independent and run by civilians, the top two officials at the DGE are both active duty military Colonels and Minister Kone retains his rank as a military General. The office within the DGE that manages Mali's controversial electoral list database - the same database the national census program RAVEC was supposed to revise before the local elections - is also managed by military officers.

11.(C) It does not sound like either of Traore's main priorities for the April legislative session, the Family Code

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and death penalty abolition, are likely to even reach the Assembly floor for a vote. The Family Code delay is attributable not to the Assembly but the Presidency, which has so far failed to release the revised text. As a result, National Assembly Deputies, women's' rights advocates, and Muslim leaders are left to debate a document which no one has actually read. It is difficult to see how the debate over the Family Code can advance absent the actual document.

12.(U) Our priority, in so far as the National Assembly is concerned, is supporting Assembly Deputies' desire for greater exchanges with legislatures and legislators in the United States. We believe these exchanges will be greatly beneficial both to Mali and the United States.
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